

A Collaborative Design

Thompson School District Instructional Coaches - Internal Lab Demonstrations -

To be a teacher in the right sense is to be a learner. Instruction begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner, put yourself in his place so that you may understand what he understands and in a way he understands it.

- Soren Kierkegaard

There are a number of professional development structures that empower teachers to grow through collaborative learning. A structure with potential for sustaining professional growth in buildings with shared goals and a clear vision is the *Internal Lab, or In-House Lab*. Born of a PEBC model and ideal for capitalizing upon established practices of collaborative conversation in our district, the linchpin of the Internal Lab is *inquiry*.

Taking an inquiry stance in professional development work assumes teachers have questions and that they are thinking about their practice. This is the point at which an Internal Lab Project can launch. It offers teachers *within their own building* opportunities to support their learning by

- helping them identify their own questions for classroom and instructional research
- participating in staff development which sustains and focuses upon school-wide goals and district initiatives
- observing students learning in classrooms other than their own
- engaging in collaborative conversation with colleagues from a variety of content areas

How is an Internal Lab Different From Other Labs?

- An Internal Lab is just that—internal. It is professional development within a school, using a structure where those teachers, supported by their coach and administrators, are opening their classroom doors to each other, and together, they work to uncover questions they have about instruction and learning.

- Teachers who open their doors to host a Lab Day frame an in-depth question they have about some aspect of classroom instruction and learning. They look forward to gathering feedback—data—on how strategies, rituals, routines, and structures they are developing are working in their own lab—their classroom.

- That is where the participants come in—they are the building colleagues who come in to observe a lesson taught by a Lab Host teacher on a designated day. They provide additional pairs of eyes to provide feedback and data to the Lab Host teacher. Also, *and this is important*: observers come to a Lab Day with a question or “wondering” of their own to focus their own observations.

These are not expert teachers on pedestals “showcasing” their teaching. They are your colleagues who are willing to be vulnerable and open their classroom doors to invite in their building colleagues—all for the purpose of inviting feedback and growing their learning together through observation and structured, reflective conversation about that observation. It is a design for continuous learning.

In the end, the ultimate goal is growing kids’ learning through improvements in teacher practice—engendering academic achievement and school success for all kids.

Organizing an Internal lab Project in Your School

If you think the term “internal lab” sounds like a medical procedure, choose a label you like, such as in-house lab, or peer observation, whatever fits. The essential points are that the *purpose* of the structure reflects your school’s focus for professional development, and encompasses three essential elements for this collaborative work:

1. one or more teachers who “host” an observation in their classroom, building colleagues and administrators who observe, and a facilitator—may be an instructional coach or another teacher
2. the “sandwich:” a prebriefing conversation, classroom observation and a debriefing, reflective conversation following the observation facilitated between the observers and the host teacher(s)
3. labs are generated by inquiry:
 - host teacher is exploring some aspect of instructional practice and seeks data in the form of feedback from observers—not presenting as an *expert*
 - each observer has a focus for observation based on his/her own questions about instructional practice

Some Critical Questions: *(Add your own!)*

1. What are the shared building goals around which we target our building professional development?
2. What would be our building’s *purpose* for developing an internal lab project?
3. What elements of the present culture in our school can we build upon to develop an internal lab project? *(Example: collaborative practice in PLC’s, Lesson Study experience, etc.)*
4. How might we use the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model to develop an internal lab structure in our school?
5. How do I, as a coach, help teachers identify and narrow their questions about instructional practice? How do we develop this into an inquiry stance to drive research?
6. How do we encourage or invite teachers to volunteer to be “lab hosts?”
7. How do we build interest among our colleagues to participate as observers?

A Generic Checklist for Planning an Internal Lab Day

Lab Host(s) _____ Facilitator _____

Date of Lab _____ Lab Participants: _____

One to Two Months Prior to Lab Date:

- _____ 1. Meet with host teacher to determine time schedule for Lab
- _____ 2. Determine location for prebrief and debrief
- _____ 3. Communicate (email or your building protocol for communication) schedule and details to lab participants; CC all communication to host teacher, building administrators, office staff
- _____ 4. Spend time in host teacher's classes, taking notes on routines and rituals, questioning, teacher talk, integration of content and strategy instruction, individual teaching style, room layout, student/teacher dialogue, classroom culture, and anything else you notice. Aim for weekly visits, but honor teacher's preferences and always *check first*. Lay the groundwork for these observations as part of the collaborative nature of the lab. Ask the lab host what he/she would like you to notice or watch for. Continue coaching conversations
- _____ 5. Arrange for substitutes for lab participants and facilitator, if necessary.

Two Weeks Before Lab Date:

- _____ 1. Meet with host teacher to confirm schedule, instructional focus and research question for the lab, schedule additional meeting times as needed, and offer assistance in preparing and making copies of a host letter to be distributed to participants on Lab Day.
- _____ 2. Email reminder with Lab Day schedule and details attached to:
 - lab participants
 - CC to
 - host teacher
 - building administrators
 - office staff
- _____ 3. Check again on substitute teacher coverage (yes, again)

One Week to Three Days Before Lab Date:

- _____ 1. Meet with host teacher, check on host letter preparation, send out a final email reminder to all
- _____ 2. Arrange for snacks for lab session (optional, but nice)
- _____ 3. Check again on room availability for prebrief and debrief

- _____ 4. Arrange for additional chairs for host teacher's classroom on Lab Day
- _____ 5. Check on substitute situation...
- _____ 6. Assemble materials for prebrief/debrief: extra copies of lab day schedule, copies of host letter, other handouts, sticky notes, highlighters, pencils, pens, easel, and markers
- _____ 7. Store snacks/drinks in room; clean tables & chairs
- _____ 8. Check on substitutes/which ones go where

Night Before or Wee Early Hours of Lab Day:

- _____ 1. Move chairs for lab participants into host teacher's classroom
- _____ 2. Set up snacks and materials for the lab session
- _____ 3. Reassure host teacher! Look for ways to reduce LHS (Lab Host Stress):
 - run copies
 - offer to bring them a latte (or their preference), breakfast or lunch
 - take their playground, bus or lunchroom duty to free them up that day if you can
- _____ 4. **ENJOY this collaborative time with your colleagues! *This is truly attending to the "soul of work."***

Generic checklist for planning an Internal Lab Day

One to Two Months prior to lab date:

- _____ 1. Meet with host teacher to determine time schedule for lab
- _____ 2. Determine location for prebrief and debrief
- _____ 3. Sell to staff – invites for lab participants
- _____ 4. Communicate with lab participants and host – details about the lab and schedule (cc to building administration, office staff, whole staff if applicable)
- _____ 5. Spend time in host teacher's classes, taking notes on routines and rituals, questioning, teacher talk, integration of content and strategy instruction, individual teaching style, room layout, student/teacher dialogue, classroom culture, and anything else you notice. Aim for weekly visits, but honor the teacher's preferences and always check first. Lay the ground work for these observations as part of the collaborative nature of the lab. Ask the lab host what he/she would like you to notice or watch for. Continue coaching conversations.
- _____ 6. Arrange for substitutes for lab host, participants and facilitator if necessary

Two weeks before lab date:

- _____ 1. Meet with host teacher to confirm schedule, instructional focus and inquiry question for the lab, schedule additional meeting times as needed, and offer assistance in preparing and making copies of a host letter to be distributed to participants on lab day.
- _____ 2. Email reminder with lab day schedule and details attached to:
Host teacher, lab participants, building administration, office staff, whole staff if applicable
- _____ 3. Check again on substitute teacher coverage (yes again!)

One week to three days before the lab date:

- _____ 1. Meet with host teacher, check on host letter preparation, send out a final email reminder to all
- _____ 2. Arrange for snacks for lab session (optional, but nice)
- _____ 3. Check again on room availability for prebrief and debrief
- _____ 4. Arrange for additional chairs for host teacher's classroom for lab day
- _____ 5. Check on substitute coverage – make sure all jobs have been accepted and filled
- _____ 6. Assemble materials for prebrief/debrief: extra copies of lab day schedule, copies of host letter, other handouts, sticky notes, highlighters, pencils, pens, easel, markers, etc.
- _____ 7. Store snacks/drinks in room, make sure it is an inviting environment

Night before or wee early hours of lab day:

- _____ 1. Move chairs for lab participants into host teacher's classroom
- _____ 2. Set up snacks and materials for lab session
- _____ 3. Reassure Host Teacher!!! Look for ways to reduce LHS (Lab Host Stress)
(run copies, offer to bring them a latte(or their preference), breakfast or lunch, find a replacement for their duty...)
- _____ 4. Enjoy this collaborative time with your colleagues! This is truly attending to the "soul of work."

Hosting and Facilitating Lab Classrooms

Getting Started

- focus the observation
- honor the existing tone, structure and community of the classroom
- discuss the thinking behind the lesson
- take notes – script conferences, generate questions, catch student and teacher dialogue, shadow the teacher
- connect the lesson to research
- change the lens focus on subsequent visits – whole class, small group, follow a child, observe transitions

During the Observation

- offer crowd control – encourage participants to “lean in” on conferences, book talks, share sessions and mini-lessons
- answer questions during the debriefing session
- let participants in on metacognitive thinking concerning your teaching

After the Observation

- encourage written reflections by modeling your own writing for participants
- invite conversations about all aspects of the observation (e.g., “What did you record, notice, and wonder?”)

Collaboration About Next Steps

- What did we learn from students?
- How does research inform our planning?
- What does today's observation suggest for your own classroom?
- Did anything surprise you about today's lesson?
- Where do you feel this instruction is going?
- How does this observation connect with your own current classroom work?
- What further support do you need?

Focusing Our Observation

"Seeing Is Believing"

Classroom visitations are a powerful professional development tool. They are most memorable and impactful when guided by shared agreements and expectations. Please keep the following guidelines in mind as you participate in this collegial experience.

- Honor the existing (or developing) tone, structure, and community by limiting any distracting side-conversations.
- Take a learning stance and be ready with a focus question or wondering to help anchor your observations. This is your time to tend to your own learning.
- Be ready to think through the entire process: the planning, the observation and the debriefing.
- Remember that you are an observer. Trust that the host teacher knows his/her students and is a professional.
- Record your observations and be responsible for bringing these notes back to help frame the debriefing session.
- Change your focus during the observation. For example, shift from whole class to small group, follow a child, track transitions, note the classroom environment, record evidence of the tone and community, focus on the schedule, script conferences and interactions, watch for ongoing assessment, listen for the teacher demonstrating her own thinking processes, find evidence of the gradual release of responsibility, note the instructional focus, or capture evidence pointing to what you believe the teacher values.
- Work to balance advocacy and inquiry by carefully blending your sharing with active listening.
- Generate further questions, connections and extensions for the next observation.
- Enjoy this opportunity to learn alongside colleagues as you see the many ways research informs ongoing instruction.

Tips for Lab Facilitation

How can facilitators guide participants to see below the surface?

Plan note-taking in advance – After going over an observation guide and hearing a preview from the classroom teacher concerning the day's instruction, ask participants to share what specific area they plan to note and script for the group. Writing down these plans, making sure to add your thinking to the list, helps to further focus the observation.

Keep participants close to the action – During the observation, help move participants close to the action. Make sure different teams of scripters can hear conferences, lean in on invitational groups, see charts during crafting lessons and are present for reflecting sessions.

Avoid holding side conversations – Because the group has been asked to write down questions and connections for the debriefing, the facilitator is freed from side conversations during the observation. This helps to model the importance of protecting the existing tone and community created by the classroom teacher.

Take time for written response – Directly following the observation, it's helpful to ask participants to take several minutes to write a response to what they've just seen. Having highlighters available for them to pull information from their notes is another great way to honor the important work of investigating our own observations.

Debrief with the classroom teacher – After the observation, it's essential that the lab teacher talk about the thinking behind the morning's instruction and to answer questions concerning:

- instruction that occurred before this lesson
- instruction that will occur after this lesson
- how this particular lesson grew directly out of students' needs
- how conferring with students informs instruction
- ongoing assessment (formal and informal)
- classroom rituals and routines
- the role of written reflection and response notebooks
- storage issues
- scheduling decisions
- material selection

Set new goals for the second visit – Based on the observation, debriefing session and their own burning issues, what do the participants want to watch for on their second classroom observation?

Share personal insights – During the debriefing sessions, participants need a chance to exchange their own classroom connections and extensions. Asking observers to share personal insights from their work with comprehension strategies generates additional information for the group.

Bringing it home – Help observers name specific ways they will share all they've seen and talked about to their colleagues at their own school site.

As a facilitator it's important to:

Notice what struck you in the demonstration and turn this into an open-ended launch for discussion. Naming instruction for the group and then asking participants to connect and respond helps the group investigate instruction with a wider lens.

Tips for the Lab Host Teacher

Okay, so I've agreed to do this, now what?

1. **Communicate with your facilitator before, during and after your observations.**
Plan the days with your facilitator so that she knows how to prepare the participants. While the lab is going on, keep in mind that the facilitator is there for you. If something is not going well, she will take care of it, but only if you tell her. Afterward, ask for feedback from both the participants and from your facilitator.
2. **Share your professional reading with participants.**
Sharing your professional readings, books or journals, is not only a great model for the participants but also may give people new titles to look into.
3. **Rely on the structures you already use to carry your students through the day.**
Ask yourself, "What are the structures that my class is already comfortable with?" Keep to the good, old stuff. Having observers in the classroom will upset the apple cart a bit, but if you throw in a new structure or change a consistent schedule, it may cause an even greater disruption. Remember, the observers are in your room to see what you do on a normal day. Don't try to plan a huge show for them. Instead, go with what you would normally have been doing that day.
4. **Prepare your students for the lab days.**
Let them know who is coming and why they are in your room. Let them know that it might be a little bit uncomfortable at first, when nine teachers are all gathered around during their conference time scribbling notes as fast as they can. Let them know that these teachers are all here to learn from them. Today, they will not only be students, but teachers too!
5. **Expect the unexpected.**
The day is planned and everything is in place. You feel ready for anything. Anything, that is, except the unannounced chili cook off. Yep, the lunch ladies show up in your room with two pots of steaming chili, wanting to know which type the students like best. Life happens. All the lab participants will understand completely (with sympathetic smiles) when, during the lesson of their lives, your students stop and taste chili. Everyone who has taught knows that things happen that are out of our control. Don't worry. You can all laugh about it at the debriefing session. (This is a true story by the way. One of many!)
6. **Relax! The day will go well.**
Having observers in your room is an exciting learning experience. All of our lab teachers have shared that their experiences hosting labs have been the best and most thoughtful of their teaching careers. It is a luxury to have six extra sets of eyes in your classroom, helping you see things in new and different ways.

Pondering:

What do you expect from someone who's facilitating a group of visitors in your classroom?

I expect my facilitator to:

- ask questions that will get me to my best thinking
- name the things I didn't even notice I did – name the brilliance
- provide time for me to come down from the 'high' of being observed – take over the stage and run the group
- talk with me before and after . . . debrief and plan . . . know my classroom and who I am as a teacher
- provide feedback after the group is gone – 'here's another brilliant thing I noticed that you did'
- encourage observers to share their notes with me
- focus the group on one or two 'look fors'
- jump in during a debriefing if I get 'stuck'
- nudge observers' thinking – look beyond the 'pretty room' or 'great charts'
- be prepared, on time and friendly
- understand how children think and learn
- let me in on the purpose of the visit . . . what the observers hope to walk away with and why they're visiting in the first place
- focus the prebrief and debrief on specific areas of instruction
- notice underlying rituals and routines, and bring them to the forefront of the discussion
- write my students, my principal and me a note after the visit
- know a little about the school, not just my classroom
- be a scholar and a learner
- bring calmness, humor and sincerity to the visit



Walt Clark Middle School Inquiry Lab Demonstrations

Questions focus our thinking. Ask empowering questions like: What's good about this? What's not perfect about it yet? What am I going to do next time? How can I do this and have fun doing it?

- Charles Connolly

What is the purpose of an Inquiry lab?

In professional development, an inquiry lab takes on the stance that a teacher has a question that he/she is thinking about their instructional practice. This type of lab offers teachers opportunities within their own building to support their learning by:

- Helping them to identify their own questions for classroom and instructional research
- Participating in staff development which sustains and focuses upon school-wide goals and district initiatives
- Observing students learning in classrooms other than their own
- Engaging in collaborative conversation with colleagues from a variety of content areas

Why does an Inquiry lab work?

1. An Inquiry lab is professional development within a school, using a structure where those teachers, supported by their coach and administrators, are opening their classroom doors to each other, and together, they work to uncover questions they have about instruction and learning.
2. Teachers, who open their doors to host a lab, frame an in-depth question they have about some aspect of classroom instruction and/or learning. They look forward to getting feedback-data on how strategies, routines, and structures they are utilizing are working in their own "lab" classroom.

3. Participants are building colleagues who come in to observe a lesson taught by a lab host teacher on a designated day. They are additional eyes and ears to collect and provide feedback-data to the host teacher. These observers come to this lab day with a question or wondering of his/her own to help focus their own observations.

Who can be involved in an Inquiry lab?

First, we need to establish a lab host, someone who has a question about instruction or learning that is taking place in his/her classroom. Do you have a burning question around rigor, relevance, or relationship (classroom culture) that centers around instructional practice? Would you be willing to host a lab and share your awesome classroom experience not just with your students, but also with your colleagues?

Next we need observer/participants. We are seeking anyone who would like to spend the day with us on this new adventure. Scott is allocating sub monies for each individual and the lab host. We will have to limit the number of participants to about five. Are YOU interested in seeing learning and instruction other than that which takes place in your own classroom?

Finally, we will schedule the date for the lab and set off together. The day will be something along the format of

- *Meet in the conference room at 7:15 - breakfast snacks provided
- *Pre-brief and dialogue about the lab
- *Observation of the classroom
- *De-brief and dialogue, sharing feedback-data with lab host
- *Break for lunch off campus together
- *Finish de-brief and dialogue
- *Workshop time for all participants and lab host to continue on your own learning and planning
- *Final wrap-up and dismiss just before the final bell

Come and join us!



Walt Clark Middle School Inquiry Lab Demonstrations

Questions focus our thinking. Ask empowering questions like: What's good about this? What's not perfect about it yet? What am I going to do next time? How can I do this and have fun doing it?

- Charles Connolly

What is the purpose of an Inquiry lab?

In professional development, an inquiry lab takes on the stance that a teacher is reflective about his/her instructional practice and/or classroom management. This type of lab offers teachers opportunities within their own building to support their learning by:

- Helping them to identify their own questions for classroom and instructional research
- Participating in staff development which sustains and focuses upon school-wide goals and district initiatives
- Observing and dialoguing about students' learning in classrooms other than their own
- Engaging in collaborative conversations with colleagues from a variety of content areas

Who and what will be involved in an Inquiry lab?

Our lab host volunteers, peer participants and instructional coach facilitator. Lab hosts are listed on the back with tentative dates. Peer participants will observe, provide feedback, and take away personal learning.

Now we need observer/participants. We are seeking anyone who would like to spend the day with us on this learning adventure. Martha is allocating substitutes for the day. We will have to limit the number of participants to five for each lab. An outline of the day follows:

The day will be something along the format of:

- *Meet in the conference room at 7:15 - breakfast snacks provided
- *Pre-brief and dialogue about the lab
- *Observation of the classroom
- *Debrief and dialogue, sharing feedback-data with lab host
- *Break for lunch off campus together - lab hosts choice or bring your own along
- *Finish debrief and dialogue
- *Workshop time for all participants and lab host to continue on your own learning and planning
- *Final wrap-up and dismiss just before the final bell

Are YOU interested in seeing learning and instruction other than that which takes place in your own classroom? Please indicate the lab host you would like to observe, rank your choice(s), and list your requested substitute. We will try to meet everyone's preferences.

Name: _____

_____ Emilia Chacon - Wednesday, November 10th

_____ Chad Custer - Wednesday, December 8th

_____ Amanda Myers - Wednesday, January 26th

_____ Jaymie Cruickshank - Wednesday, March 2nd

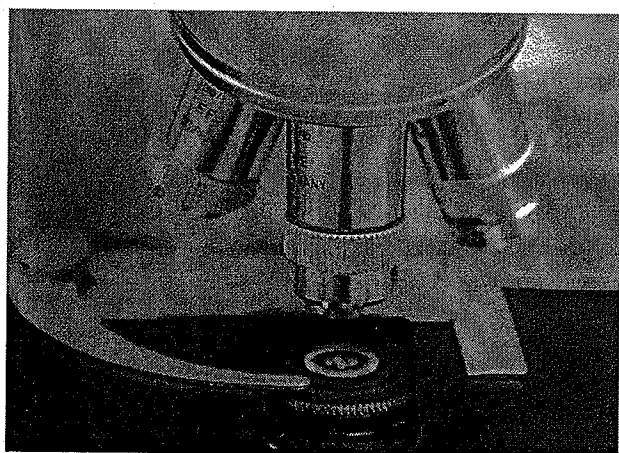
_____ Dylan Wittstruck - Wednesday, April 13th

Substitute request: _____

Vol. 5, No. 5
February 2010

13 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS



PEER LEARNING LABS
PUT TEACHER PRACTICE

UNDER *the* MICROSCOPE

By Valerie von Frank

Instructional coaches in Thompson School District (Loveland and Berthoud, Colo.) have an unusual tool in their tool kits. Not quite Japanese lesson study, not quite classroom walk-through, peer learning labs are a professional learning opportunity that has evolved from coaches' and leaders' experiences.

The district began to hire instructional coaches in 2006, putting in place a part-time coach for the early childhood center and each of the 18 elementary schools and a full-time coach for each of the 10 secondary schools. District leaders went to the community for the funding, raising a special millage to support the program.

At the same time, in a partnership with the Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC), a nonprofit group of business and education leaders committed to strengthening Colorado's public schools, professional learning took a new form. PEBC's staff developer began working with the instructional coach at a targeted school, and PEBC invited four teachers from the school to participate in a lab setting to observe and learn from master teachers using targeted instructional strategies. The labs required time for teachers to travel to Denver, and the district soon recognized that funding for teachers to visit off-site lab classrooms was finite. The instructional coach at that school launched an internal lab project one day a month, modeling the PEBC lab.

Learning for instructional coaches was also ramping up. The district provided Cognitive Coaching training and weekly coaches' meetings for book studies, among other support.

What's inside

NSDC tool

Prepare for lesson observations with a focused discussion.

Page 4

Lessons from a coach

Jason Heiser says listen to teachers and rely on a network.

Page 5



Focus on NSDC's standards

Professional learning keeps evolving through the decades.

Page 6



National Staff
Development
Council
800-727-7288
www.nsdc.org

NSDC's purpose: Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

Melding all of these methods, peer learning labs were born. While Japanese lesson study focuses on teachers honing a common lesson and classroom observations involve an observer or team looking for predetermined evidence of specific practices, peer lesson labs involve coaches helping teachers to focus on their own question of practice and then invite colleagues to their classrooms to assist in collecting data to allow the teacher to examine that question.

Examining questions of practice

Colleagues volunteer to attend the lab, the school leader provides substitute teacher time, and the group often debriefs during districtwide early-release Wednesdays, created to provide teachers with professional learning time. Peer learning labs allow teachers the opportunity to directly address a question of practice for their own learning, with support from the instructional coach.

From a seasoned teacher wondering why what he or she has done in the past is not working to improve student reading, to a young teacher figuring out what works with a hard-to-reach youngster, the peer learning lab helps teachers gather data that they can reflect on with peers to seek their own answers.

"It's very different from bringing a group of teachers in to watch a 'master teacher,'" said Diane Lauer, Thompson's director of curriculum and instruction. "We didn't want these to look, feel, or sound anything like that. These teachers have expertise, but you're not going in to specifically learn from them because they're masters at what they do. Participants go in knowing it's an inquiry lab, and we're engaging in a question that's going to enhance the learning for that teacher. Participants observe and collect data."

Trish Malik, who works part time as an instructional coach and also serves as the district's coordinator of instructional coaches, said she used the lab as a teacher herself. "It helps bring clarity and helps each of us ramp up our instruction," Malik said. She said the labs also are essential in her role as coach and coordinator. "Our job as coach is to help mediate teachers' thinking to help them grow."

Formulating good questions

Lauer said the labs are an iteration of Cognitive Coaching, which typically includes the planning conversation, the event, and the reflecting conversation. The instructional coaches' training in Cognitive Coaching was essential for this work, she said. "Cognitive Coach training provides the language and the vision for how to have that coaching cycle and conversation," Lauer said. "Coaches have the tool kit for how to help frame the questions, to paraphrase. It has been the foundation."

During a planning conversation with the instructional coach, the teacher formulates an inquiry question — something specific about the teacher's own instruction that he or she wants to study using data.

The instructional coach helps the teacher formulate the question and determine what data to collect. The coach also may go into the classroom to observe and get background.

"The level of questioning is deepening teachers' understanding of content," Lauer said. Questions have ranged from inquiry around instructional strategies to curricular investigations.

Some examples:

- As I'm conferring with students for reader's workshop, are other students able to stay on task?
- What does rigor look like in the classroom?
- How can I make more seamless the students' articulation to the next grade level?

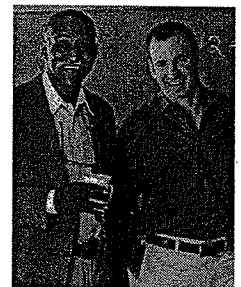
In the last case, improving grade articulation, teams of 6th-grade teachers observed 5th-grade teachers and vice versa. But generally, Lauer said, the observers cut across all content and grade levels, one of the boons of the lab experience.

"We want a cross-fertilization of ideas, people who might not be able to do the lesson but can engage in the question — what is rigor or how does that reading comprehension strategy support the content area," said Lauer.

"It's really about the teacher who has the question," Malik said. "The lab is held to facilitate the teacher's thinking around that question, not about everyone using the same lesson" as in Japanese lesson study.

NSDC'S BELIEF

Schools' most complex problems are best solved by educators collaborating and learning together.



From a seasoned teacher wondering why what he or she has done in the past is not working to improve student reading, to a young teacher figuring out what works with a hard-to-reach youngster, the peer learning lab helps teachers gather data that they can reflect on with peers to seek their own answers.

**Engaging peers for assistance**

Before the observation, the coach ensures that participating teachers share an understanding of the “ground rules” for the observation, such as whether teachers will help struggling students during their time in the room. If needed, the coach also might work with the group on Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman’s norms for collaboration (2009). The coach shares with the group the inquiry question and the tool for data collection, setting up, for example, a three-column notes tool. The teacher sets the time for the visit, and the group observes.

During the debriefing after the observation, the instructional coach facilitates, helping the teacher analyze the data and helping participants make connections to their own practices.

“When the coach notices a teacher wrestling with a question that could benefit from data collection, the coach could collect the data, but also could invite other teachers to do so,” said Lauer. “This creates more collegial interactions and different results than one-on-one observations by the coach. We have found this is powerful professional development for the teacher to invite other teachers

into the classroom to wrestle with a question around instruction.”

The learning labs are not a district or school requirement in any way. They begin when a teacher is willing to open her classroom and her practice in a deeper way to promote her own learning. Some schools have labs throughout the year; some may have had only a few. Others in the district may not have used the process.

Malik said labs help increase the culture of collaboration within the school, with the idea of deprivatizing practice.

“We’ve really tried to build coaches’ capacity so they have several tools to use,” Malik said. “We try to help coaches envision possible different ways to work with teachers. Peer learning labs are just another strategy.”

Reference

Garmston, R. & Wellman, B. (2009). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups*. (2nd ed.). Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon. ♦

“We want a cross-fertilization of ideas, people who might not be able to do the lesson but can engage in the question — what is rigor or how does that reading comprehension strategy support the content area.”

— Diane Lauer,
Thompson School
District director of
curriculum and
instruction

Teachers Teaching Teachers (T3)™ is published eight times a year by the National Staff Development Council
504 S. Locust St.
Oxford, OH 45056

© Copyright, NSDC, 2010.
All rights reserved.

MAIN BUSINESS OFFICE

504 S. Locust St.
Oxford, OH 45056
513-523-6029
800-727-7288
Fax: 513-523-0638
NSDCoffice@nsdc.org
www.nsdc.org

Editor: Tracy Crow
Designer: Kitty Black

NSDC STAFF**Executive director**

Stephanie Hirsh

Deputy executive director

Joellen Killion

Director of business services

Leslie Miller

Director of learning

Carol François

Director of strategy and development

Frederick Brown

Associate director of publications

Tracy Crow

Associate director of member experience

Tom Manning

Distinguished senior fellow

Hayes Mizell

Scholar laureate

Shirley Hord

BOARD OF TRUSTEES**Ingrid Carney**

President

Mark Diaz (2011)

President-elect

Sue Elliott (2011)

Cheryl Love (2010)

Charles Mason (2010)

Past president

Amanda Rivera (2012)

Kenneth Salim (2012)

Ed Wittchen (2010)

COPYING/REPRINT POLICY

All content in *Teachers Teaching Teachers (T3)* is copyright protected by the National Staff Development Council and may not be copied or reprinted without permission. Please see www.nsdc.org/news/permpolicy.cfm for details as well as a form for submitting a request.

CONTACT

Complete contact information for all staff and board members is available on the web site at www.nsdc.org/about/index.cfm.

Focusing your observations • _____'s Class

See the entire lesson through the eyes and ears of:

What surprises you? What are your reactions? What questions would you ask the teacher?	
Student	Your Responses
<div>Name:</div>	

Write down everything the teacher says, record nonverbal interpretations, note anything said to another student anything teacher says to the student.